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Rudman Chides Walsh on Strategy

'Ad Nauseam' Pace Is Said To Impede Hill's Inquiry

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Sen. Warren B. Rudman (R-N.H.), vice chairman of the Senate panel on the Iran-contra affair, said yesterday that independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh appears to be pursuing a fruitless prosecution strategy and chided Walsh for making demands that are slowing congressional attempts to unravel the full story.

Rudman said that Congress has an overriding responsibility to tell the American people what happened as quickly as possible and that the truth is more likely to come out through congressional hearings than from criminal prosecutions brought by Walsh.

"There are too many important issues facing the country for the American people to wait while [Walsh's] investigation goes on ad nauseam," Rudman said.

He said congressional investigators have reviewed reams of documents, interviewed scores of witnesses and essentially have uncovered much of what happened. However, Rudman said, key questions about the involvement of high-level administration officials, including President Reagan, could not be answered without the testimony of two witnesses: fired National Security aide Lt. Col. Oliver L. North and Reagan's former national security adviser, Rear Adm. John M. Poindexter.

Congressional investigators will begin questioning Poindexter next month after promising to

grant limited immunity that would prevent his testimony from being used against him and North will be examined in June under an agreement worked out with Walsh.

"I'm not being critical of [Walsh]," Rudman said. "I'm simply saying the train is leaving the station We're ready to roll and Judge Walsh has to understand that." Joint House and Senate public hearings on the Iran-contra affair will begin in less than two weeks.

Rudman's comments, which were made in a luncheon meeting with Washington Post editors and reporters and in a later telephone interview, came a day after Walsh urged the House Iran-contra com-

mittee not to grant immunity to former Central Intelligence Agency officer Thomas G. Clines. Walsh also told reporters that his criminal inquiry is being increasingly crimped by congressional attempts to grant limited immunity from prosecution to figures in the Iran-contra affair.

In a telephone interview yesterday, Walsh said his request to the House committee on Clines "had nothing to do with delay."

"I was asking that a particular person not be given immunity at all," Walsh said. Walsh said he believes other witnesses should be able to supply the same information the committee expects to get from Clines and that Clines is not someone "to whom prosecution should be quickly surrendered."

Once witnesses testify before the House and Senate committees under immunity grants, no information derived from what they say, in public or in private sessions, may be used against them in court unless they perjure themselves. Walsh has repeatedly said that independent evidence must be developed before prosecutors and congressional investigators will know if what they are told by immunized witnesses is really the truth.

"My underlying presentation [Wednesday] was that the illusion that immunity can be granted without damage to prosecution is no more than an illusion," Walsh said.

Walsh is known to be pursuing his investigation on the premise that a conspiracy to defraud the government, perhaps two conspiracies, took place in the course of the Reagan administration's secret arms sales to Iran and the related financing of the contras fighting the government of Nicaragua.

Rudman, a lawyer and a former attorney general of New Hampshire, said he has concluded that the only significant crime likely to have arisen from the Iran-contra affair is the charge of obstruction of justice, which is in part related to allegations that White House documents were shredded or altered. Rudman said the evidence to support an obstruction of justice charge is either already available or should be within a matter of weeks.

"If they go with some grand, wild conspiracy case," Rudman said, "you're going to have a hell of a time proving it The Congress has really got to get on with this."